

Written Testimony
Congressman Andy Barr (KY-06)

Thank you Chairman McKeon for providing me the opportunity to speak before the House Armed Services Committee today. I come before you in support of our Active, Guard, and Reserve components, as well as our veterans to ensure they receive the needed equipment and support they deserve.

The United States must be capable of proactively protecting the nation and its citizens. Our Armed Forces must maintain a superior military force and be ready to act anywhere in the world where our vital national interests are threatened. I believe this can be achieved by giving our military the resources it needs to keep us safe and maintain freedom. Today, I want to particularly focus on the National Guard, which faces mounting challenges regarding how to replace equipment that is obsolete and worn out through normal wear and tear, as well as strengthening family readiness programs.

I stand beside the Commonwealth of Kentucky's Adjutant General, Major General Edward Tonini in requesting that we fully fund the FY14 National Guard and Reserve Equipment Account (NGREA) request in order to remain mission capable, and a valuable asset towards maintaining our national defense. I know that appropriations are not within this Committee's jurisdiction, but I do want to commend Chairman McKeon for his persistent and strong efforts when it comes to advocating for our military to have the funding resources it needs to do its job and maintain readiness.

I also would like to address the alarming increase in suicides which, as you know, are quickly becoming an epidemic throughout the U.S. military and among veterans. The VA reports that 22 veterans take their lives every day.

Service members and veterans that are at high risk of suicide and dangerous behavioral health conditions need appropriate access to mental health professionals for screening, care, and referrals. On-site access to mental health professionals has proven successful in overcoming time, geographical, and stigma barriers that have saved countless lives. I ask that this committee work to strengthen programs that will aid in stabilizing our service men and women's mental health.

Additionally, one of the greatest concerns that I am hearing from the Veterans Coalition I have formed in my district is distress over retirees and their dependents, who are not yet Medicare-eligible, being transitioned from TRICARE Prime to TRICARE Standard. Many in my district have voiced concerns that this forces retirees to pay higher out of pocket expenses, increases co-pays, and creates higher deductibles.

We need to ensure that we keep our commitments to current retirees and family members from whom we have asked for such extraordinary sacrifices. I encourage the Committee not to move forward in changing Prime Service Areas (PSA's) which would have the effect of limiting TRICARE options. Or as a solution, consider a onetime TRICARE Prime opt-in option for

current retirees not living in PSA's, which is all of Kentucky with the exception of Fort Campbell.

Separately, a number of concerns have been brought to my attention regarding the Blue Grass Chemical Activity (BGCA), which is taking place at the Blue Grass Army Depot (BGAD) located in Richmond, Kentucky.

As you know, the United States is legally obligated to ensure the destruction of all chemical weapons under the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction Treaty (CWC Treaty).

Many are concerned that the Blue Grass Chemical Activity at the Blue Grass Army Depot is not receiving the resources needed to complete the chemical demilitarization operations. The main funding source for BGCA is the Operation and Maintenance, Army (OMA) funding. OMA funds have been reduced from \$23 million to \$18 million.

This cut in funding comes at a very critical time in addition to hiring freezes, furloughs, and a Reduction of Force (RIF) that have taken place at the Depot. Due to these cuts, BGCA will be challenged to continue supporting vital chemical demilitarization operations obligations demanded by the CWC Treaty, and so I hope to work further with the Committee to address these concerns, and provide the necessary response.

Further, I would like to personally thank Chairman McKeon and this Committee for your leadership and strong support for increasing public-private partnerships at arsenals and depots. As someone who recognizes that public-private partnerships can play an important role in bringing long-term stability and jobs to communities, I certainly encourage this Committee to continue to take an active role in this area.

By providing increased opportunity for additional business – not limited to the defense industry – to locate or relocate to the Depot, it would not only increase revenue to the Army Working Capital Fund but also allow for additional jobs to the people of the community. I look forward to working with this Committee, the DOD, and the BGAD in my District, in order to help the Depot reach its fullest potential.

I am humbled and inspired every day by the patriotism and dedication to duty that resides in the hearts of the men and women who chose to serve in our nation's Armed Services. I look forward to working with this Committee to help address the matters I have raised today. Thank you.